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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [PHUM](#) [KN](#)
SUBJECT: GERMAN DCM IN PYONGYANG: NO INSTABILITY IN DPRK
AS THE REGIME MOVES TO REASSERT "PERFECT CONTROL"

REF: A. SEOUL 749
[1](#)B. SEOUL 657

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Klaus Wendelberger, DCM at the German Embassy in Pyongyang, told poloff that the DPRK had moved aggressively in recent months to reassert control of the North Korean population, taking steps ranging from resuming control of the rice supply to tighter limits on the flow of information, including increased seizures of DVDs and CDs. There were no signs of instability in North Korea but it was clear the regime was unpopular, said Wendelberger, who echoed other reports that North Korea's exhausted soil required increasing inputs for a diminishing rate of return. Wendelberger described extensive Chinese penetration of the North Korean economy and supported the notion of funding overseas study by young North Koreans as a way to promote positive change in the regime. END SUMMARY.

REGIME MOVES TO REASSERT CONTROL OF THE POPULATION

[1](#)2. (C) Poloff met on March 15 with Klaus Wendelberger, Deputy Head of Mission at the German Embassy in Pyongyang, to hear Wendelberger's impressions of his two years in the DPRK. Wendelberger noted that in recent months the regime had taken numerous steps to assert greater control of the population. Security forces were significantly more visible around Pyongyang and the reinstitution of the Public Distribution System for rice had also increased the regime's ability to control the people's daily lives.

[1](#)3. (C) Wendelberger assessed that the decision to expel international aid organizations was a component of this larger effort to increase the regime's control. By successfully addressing the population's needs when the government was unable to do so, he reasoned, NGOs tended to undermine the regime's authority. Moreover, many NGOs operated in the provinces, which gave foreigners unique insight into conditions outside Pyongyang, and gave provincial North Koreans a rare opportunity to interact with foreigners. The regime found both of these situations unsettling.

[1](#)4. (C) Security forces were also instituting tighter restrictions on what travelers were allowed to bring into the

country, said Wendelberger. The police were now much more aggressive about confiscating DVDs, CDs and other media from outside of the DPRK. The regime had also reinstituted limits on driving as part of an effort to curb the mobility of the population and hinder the spread of information.

NO INSTABILITY IN A REGIME WITH PERFECT CONTROL . . .

15. (C) There were no signs of instability in North Korea, said Wendelberger, adding that neither his Embassy nor German NGOs had been able to substantiate press reports of anti-regime graffiti or the desecration of photographs of Kim Jong-il. On the contrary, the security apparatus "controlled virtually everything" and there was "not a hint" of opposition to the regime. The combination of the regime's "almost perfect" control and the knowledge of any would-be oppositionists that they would be endangering not merely their own lives, but those of their entire families, effectively deterred any attempt at organized opposition.

. . . BUT CONTROL DOES NOT EQUAL POPULARITY

16. (C) Nevertheless, Wendelberger said, he was convinced that the regime was unpopular. Although North Koreans were generally terrified at the prospect of being seen talking to foreigners, Wendelberger described a couple of occasions when North Koreans had quietly said to him that "we have a very, very bad government." Wendelberger noted that he had twice attended last fall's huge Arirang festival, held to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Korean Workers Party. At first, it had appeared that the people were "crazy with adoration" at the appearance of Kim

Jong-il, but then Wendelberger realized that most people were stonefaced, clapping quietly; the deafening cheers were coming not from the crowd, but was taped applause coming through the public address system. He added that his interpreter had been punched by security personnel who were enraged that Wendelberger had failed to applaud the Great Leader.

ITS SOIL EXHAUSTED, DPRK CONSUMES ITSELF

17. (C) Wendelberger was pessimistic about the DPRK's economic prospects. The DPRK was "consuming itself." Seasoned aid workers who returned from the northeastern part of the country would weep as they described the heart-rending conditions; Wendelberger recounted personally seeing filthy children with bloated bellies running behind a train begging for food. He echoed ref A comment of Lindsay Skoll, British DCM in Pyongyang, that North Korea's soil was exhausted. The DPRK was putting "huge inputs" into agriculture for diminishing returns. An increasing number of privileged people were being ordered to work in the fields, said Wendelberger, describing the Foreign Ministry as "half-empty" during last fall's harvest season. He noted that when he had arrived in Pyongyang in 2004, he had received frequent inquiries from German businessmen interested in investing in North Korea. Such queries were now virtually nonexistent.

AVERAGE INDOOR WINTER TEMPERATURE IN PYONGYANG: 50 DEGREES

18. (C) There was little evidence of serious hunger in Pyongyang, said Wendelberger, but even there conditions were grim. Many people would go for days without access to water; Wendelberger described long lines of people at the local swimming pool waiting for a chance to take a shower. Noting that December had been the coldest on the Korean Peninsula in decades, Wendelberger said average temperatures inside Pyongyang apartments that month had reportedly been 8-10 degrees Celsius (46-50 degrees Fahrenheit).

CHINESE "ROLLING UP THE MARKET"

¶9. (C) Wendelberger concurred with reports of growing Chinese economic penetration of North Korea, saying the PRC was "rolling up the market," particularly in extractive industries. Pyongyang's international trade fair in May had been dominated by Chinese firms, which had far outnumbered North Korean companies.

NORTH KOREANS WOULD ACCEPT U.S. SCHOLARSHIP OFFERS

¶10. (C) Asked about Russian academic Andrei Lankov's ref B recommendation that the United States fund scholarships for children of the DPRK elite, Wendelberger responded that the DPRK would be likely to accept such a proposal, provided it was properly packaged. He noted that Germany provided scholarships to North Koreans; these scholarships were typically for three to eight months, but a group of ten architecture students were in Germany on a four-year program.

He added that the North Koreans were never permitted to travel alone; typically a pair would be assigned to a scholarship, although sometimes groups were larger.

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